

The American Form of Government

When [Benjamin Franklin](#) exited the Constitutional Convention, he was asked by a woman, “Sir, What have you given us?” His immediate response was, “A Republic, Ma’am, if you can keep it.” Yet most Americans today have been persuaded that our nation’s governmental system is a democracy, and not a Republic.

The difference between these two is essential in understanding Americanism, and the American system. Before we discuss political systems, however, it’s helpful to address the confusion that has been spread about the political spectrum. Many have been led to believe that the political spectrum places groups such as communism on the far left, fascism, or dictators on the far right, and political moderates, or centrists in the middle. However, a more accurate political spectrum will show government having zero power on the far right, to having 100 percent power on the far left. At the extreme right, there is no government. The extreme left features total government, under such labels as Communism, Socialism, Nazism, Fascism, Princes, [Potentates](#), Dictators, Kings, any form of total government. Those who claim that Nazis and Fascists are far right wing, never define their terms. This amounts to spreading confusion. Toward the middle of the political spectrum can be found the type of government limited to its proper role of protecting the rights of the people. That’s where the Constitution of the United States is. Those who advocate such a form of government are really constitutional moderates.

So, let’s analyze the basic forms of government: They are Monarchy or dictatorship, ruled by one, Oligarchy ruled by a few, democracy ruled by a majority, republic ruled by law, and anarchy which is ruled by no one. In discussing these 5, we’ll see that they can be narrowed down into even fewer.

Monarchy or dictatorship

Looking first at Monarchy or Dictatorship, this form of government doesn’t really exist in the practical sense. It’s always a group that puts one of its members up front: a king has his counsel of nobles or earls, and every dictator has its bureaucrats, or commissars, the men behind the scenes. This isn’t ruled by one, even though the one may be the visible leader. It’s ruled by a group. So let’s eliminate monarchy, dictatorship, because it never truly exists.

Oligarchy

Oligarchy, which is ruled by a group, is the most common form of government in all of history, and it is the most common form of government today. Most of the nations of the world today are ruled by a powerful few, and therefore oligarchy remains.

Anarchy

At the other end we find anarchy, which means “without government”. Some people have looked over history and found that many of its worse crimes were committed by governments,

so they decided that having no government might be a good idea, but this is a mistake, because as the ancient Greeks stated, “Without Law, there can be no freedom”. Our founding fathers agreed, and held that some amount of government is a necessary force in any civilized orderly society. In a state of anarchy, however, everyone has to guard life, liberty, and property, and the lives of family members. Everyone must be armed, and movement is severely restricted because one's property has to be protected at all times. Civilized people have always hired someone to do the guarding: a sheriff, a police force, or some branch of government. Once law enforcement was in place, the people were freer. They could leave their property, work in the fields, and so on. In short, “the proper amount of government makes everyone freer”.

There are some who advocate anarchy, however, not because they want no government, but because they don't like what they have. They use anarchy as a tool for revolutionary change. The condition of anarchy is very much like a vacuum, where something rushes in to fill it. These calculating anarchists work to break down this government with rioting, killing, looting, and terrorism. Tragically people living in such chaos often go to those best able to put an end to it, and beg them to take over and restore order. And who's best able to put an end to the chaos? The very people who started it - the anarchists who created the problem then create a government run by them, an oligarchy, where they have total power. This is exactly what happened in Russia, with Lenin taking total power, and in Germany, where Hitler's brown shirts created the chaos that brought him to power. But anarchy isn't a stable form of government; it's a quick transition from something that exists, to something desired by the power hungry. It's a temporary condition, and because it isn't permanent, we eliminate it, as well.

Democracy

The word “Democracy” comes from two Greek words: *Demos*, meaning *people*, and *Kratein*, meaning *to rule*. Democracy therefore means “The rule of the people”, “majority rule”. This of course, sounds good, but suppose the majority decides to take away one's home, or business, or children. Obviously, there has to be a limit. The flaw in democracy is that the majority isn't restrained. If more than half the people can be persuaded to want something in a democracy, they rule.

Republic

What about “Republic”? Well, that comes from the Latin: *Res*, meaning *thing*, and *Publica* meaning *public*; it means, the “public thing”, the law. A true republic is one where the government is limited by law, leaving the people alone. America's founders had a clean slate to write on. They could have set up an oligarchy. In fact, there were some who wanted George Washington to be their king, but the founding fathers knew history, and they chose to give us the rule of law in a republic, not the rule of the majority in a Democracy. Why? Let's demonstrate the difference in the setting of the Old West.

Consider a lynch mob in a democracy. 35 horseback riders chase one lone gunman. They catch him, and they vote 35-1 to hang him. Democracy has triumphed, and there's one less gunman to contend with. Now consider the same scenario in a republic. The 35 horseback riders catch the gunman and vote 35-1 to hang him, but the sheriff arrives, and he says, "You can't kill him; he's got his right to a fair trial." So, they take the gunman back to town. A jury of his peers is selected, and they hear the evidence of the defense, and they decide if he shall hang. Does the jury even decide by majority rule? No, it has to be unanimous, or he goes free. The rights of the gunman aren't subject to a majority rule, but to the law. This is the essence of a republic.

Many Americans would be surprised to learn that the word democracy does not appear in the Declaration of Independence or the U.S. Constitution. Nor does it appear in any of the Constitutions of the 50 states. The founders did everything they could to keep us from having a democracy. James Madison, rightly known as the father of the Constitution wrote in ***Essay #10 of the Federalist Papers***, "...democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention: have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property, and have in general been short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths." Alexander Hamilton agreed, and he stated, "We are a republican government. Real liberty is never found in despotism or in the extremes of democracy." Samuel Adams, a signer of the Declaration of Independence stated, "Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself." The founders had good reason to look upon democracy with contempt because they knew that the democracies in the early Greek city states produced some of the wildest excesses of government imaginable. In every case they ended up with mob rule, then anarchy, and finally tyranny under an oligarchy.

During that period in Greece, there was a man named [Solon](#), who urged creation of a fixed body of law that is not subject to majority [whims](#), but where the Greeks never adopted Solon's wise counsel, the Romans did. Based on what they knew of Solon's laws, they created the [12 Tables of the Roman Law](#), and in effect, built a republic that limited government power and left the people alone.

Since government was limited, the people were free to produce, with the understanding that they could keep the fruits of their labor. In time, Rome became wealthy, and the envy of the world. In the midst of plenty, however, the Roman people forgot what freedom entailed. They forgot that the essence of freedom is the proper limitation of government. When government power grows, people's freedom recedes. Once the Romans dropped their guard, Power seeking politicians began to exceed the powers granted them in the Roman Constitution. Some learned that they could elect politicians who would use government power to take property from some and give it to others. Agriculture subsidies were introduced, followed by housing and welfare programs. Inevitably taxes rose, and controls over the private sector were imposed. Soon a

number of Rome's producers could no longer make ends meet, and they went on the dole. Productivity declined, shortages developed, and mobs began roaming the streets demanding bread and circuses from the government. Many were induced to trade freedom for security. Eventually, the whole system came crashing down. They went from a republic to a democracy, and ended up with an oligarchy under the progression of the caesars.

Thus, democracy itself is not a stable form of government. Instead, it is the gradual transition from limited government to the unlimited rule of an oligarchy. Knowing this, we, as Americans are ultimately left with only two choices. We can keep our republic, as Franklin put it, or we will inevitably end up with an oligarchy, a tyranny of the elite.